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Reagan's moves criticized

World press freedom continues to deteriorate

More and more governments around the world during the past year introduced restrictive laws aimed at controlling their media, according to the International Press Institute, and this includes the Reagan Administration in the United States which IPI said "appears to have adopted a press relations policy considerably tougher and more restrictive than those of previous governments."

In its annual worldwide review on press freedom, IPI charged that President Reagan's moves to "reform" the Freedom of Information Act in the United States are actually an attempt to "curtain" it. The IPI points to a statement made in October by American Newspaper Publisher Association chairman Katharine Graham who said the government's proposals to overhaul the FOI Act were "unjustified, unnecessary and undesirable."

The IPI also scores the Reagan Administration for the "ending of CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) unclassified background information briefings to reporters" and for making top-level National Security Council staff in the White House "off-limits" to reporters.

"In the past," the IPI said, "these staff provided background information on military and foreign policy subjects."

Other restrictions placed on American journalists by the government, IPI stated, came with the announcement that reporters would no longer be given any detailed accounting of American and Soviet naval power in the Mediterranean—information that was "routinely given by previous Administrations, even in times of crisis."

"The combination of these factors—the shut off access to CIA and National Security Council experts, the intimidating tone used towards the bureaucracy and the low information content of public briefings at the State and Defense departments—may seem within the Reagan Administration to have advantages in terms of controlling information flow," the IPI said.

"There is also a potentially serious loss of accountability to the public when spokesmen for two agencies that deal with matters of national life and death are unable to explain the actions of their leaders," the IPI said.

Beyond the U.S.

ments introduce legislation to stem the flow of information and to restrict the work of journalists," IPI stated in its review of the press world wide. "It cannot be said that fewer journalists have been harassed or killed during the year or that censorship has been relaxed. In fact, the whole situation has continued to deteriorate."

"More and more governments in the developing countries are introducing restrictive laws aimed at controlling their media and have made their influence known in international organizations such as UNESCO. And, thanks to UNESCO's communications policy, these governments believe that these moves have an air of acceptability."

"They are using this United Nations organization as an umbrella in their efforts to pin down and squeeze the vitality out of the press, turning it into an arm of the government information service. This is often done in the name of economic development, but there is, and never has been, proof that censorship aids development."

Ominous trends

IPI also denounced the findings of the Canadian government appointed Kent Commission, which recommended, among other things, that a Press Rights Panel which "would seek to monitor every newspaper's performance and exercise superior court powers."

IPI also cited an "ominous trend" from another "developed nation"—Spain.

"The Spanish government passed a new law (in 1981) which gives them the power to close any newspaper or radio station that defends terrorism. 'Defend' being their word for anything that goes against the government's official line," IPI stated. "This is hardly a step forward for a country that has just taken giant strides towards democracy and when the press has played such an important part in supporting this development."

IPI criticized the New World Information Order, stating that the real objectives of those political leaders who cry "imbalance in the flow of information" is "to erase any criticism of their policies."

One positive note

"One of the few positive factors of 1981," IPI said, "came in May when international news organizations banded together for the first time in a declaration urging IPI."

trol."

Representatives of the free press met at the small lakeside village of Talloires in the French Alps and resolved to fight any efforts to set up a New World Information Order that would restrict the free flow of information.

In what is now known as the Declaration of Talloires, over 60 leading editors from 20 countries termed press freedom a basic human right and called for the abolition of all censorship.

In charting press freedom over the past year, IPI said it is "becoming increasingly difficult to find more than perhaps 20 countries where such freedom can be said to exist. And, invariably where it does, there are still a wide variety of restrictions."

A "Press Freedom" review by country as excerpted from the IPI annual review follows.

Afghanistan

The chief news editor of Afghan tv crossed the border into Pakistan and defected because he said he did not want to be associated with Soviet Union manipulation and censorship of the station's output.

Angola

Reporting of events in this country has proved far from easy, with no Western observers—including journalists—having any idea of what is going on in the most important regions. No reporter has been allowed into the most populous areas of the country since 1975. Most Western journalists were thrown out in 1976.

Argentina

When President Roberto Viola took office in March he promised freedom of expression and closer contact between the government and the press. Despite the promise, press freedom is not flourishing in the country. In June, the government withdrew official advertising from *La Prensa*. This is a common method of showing disfavor at criticism of official policy. Some 200 journalists demonstrated in October against the beating of two photographers by federal police and to demand press freedom. During the year, newspapers and magazines were temporarily closed, and there were attempts to impose prior censorship on some newspapers.

Australia

Throughout the year, the country's first inquiry into newspaper ownership—the Norris Inquiry—aroused discussion. The inquiry recommended that, while there was no evidence of a detrimental effect in the present ownership patterns in the state of Victoria, a press amalgama-